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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000131

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - LLUFTIG, MBUFFINGTON, INR FOR BCARHART

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NS](#)  
SUBJECT: Minister Resigns Over "Birthday Party Scandal"

REF: Paramaribo 00120

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Accused of spending state funds for her birthday party (reftel), Minister of Transport, Communication, and Tourism Alice Amafo resigned on Tuesday, March 13th. Portions of her own party grouping, the Maroon-based A-Combination, refused to support her. This spared President Venetiaan a wrenching decision of whether to risk public outrage by standing by Amafo, or risk bringing down the coalition by standing up to the A-Combination.  
END SUMMARY

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Offers resignation but takes no responsibility  
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¶2. (SBU) The disgraced Minister of Transport, Communication, and Tourism (TCT), Alice Amafo, announced her resignation during a press conference Tuesday, March 13. At the press conference Amafo and leading A-Combination member Ronny Brunswijk (with whom she is widely rumored to be romantically involved), presented no evidence to refute allegations that Amafo's 30th birthday party was financed for at least U.S. \$12,850 out of TCT's budget. However, Amafo did not concede to the allegations either, instead using proverbs and biblical references to say that others undermined her and did not want to see her succeed. Brunswijk, too, asserted that Amafo had done absolutely nothing wrong. Both cast a large portion of the blame on the press and spoke of "manipulation." President Venetiaan was less nuanced in accepting Amafo's resignation before parliament an hour later: he said that although it appeared to him that the birthday party was intended as a "surprise" for Amafo and that he believed she was not aware of how it was being financed, a Minister must be knowledgeable about such matters within his or her own Ministry. The matter will be investigated, and Amafo remains vulnerable to being charged in a criminal court.

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Murky coalition machinations  
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¶3. (U) According to rumor and anonymous press sources, the A-Combination was not unified in support of Amafo, whose qualifications have been publicly questioned. It appears that most of the eight parties in the governing coalition refused to stand behind Amafo; Brunswijk expressed disappointment and said he had expected more solidarity. However, the lynch-pin in the matter was likely a lack of support for Brunswijk and Amafo within Brunswijk's own Maroon-based A-Combination, which is itself a grouping of three Maroon parties. While Brunswijk is the A-Combination's most important figure, his General Interior Development Party (ABOP) has only his one seat in parliament. Another member of the grouping, Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP), outnumbers Brunswijk in parliament seats by four to one, and its leader and Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Caprino Alendy, is influential in his own right.

Newspapers suggested it was Alendy who refused to risk A-Combination's future by supporting Amafo.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The public is dissatisfied with the current government, and retaining the Minister would have made matters worse. Many Surinamers, especially the opposition, are awaiting an issue which will force the government from power. Thus, President Venetiaan and the government were spared a wrenching and perhaps coalition-breaking showdown with the A-Combination thanks to the A-Combination's own internal dissent. This incident will continue to erode the waning public trust in Venetiaan's fragile coalition, but much more would have been lost if the coalition had stuck by the controversial Amafo. END COMMENT